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Thesis  
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# 24

"Incarnation in Other Faiths and Ours"

A Dissertation

Submitted to the B.D. Committee of the Senate  
of the University of Alberta, in candidacy  
for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

by.

Rev. Harold Stibbards. B.A. B.Th.

University of Alberta.

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## Introduction.

### Definition of word "Incarnation".

Derived from the Latin "Incarnatio" first used by Irenaeus, in A.D. 130, the word "Incarnation" means literally, "into flesh," being formed of the two words in Latin, "in" and "carnem".

The word " Incarnation" has, in Christian lands, come to mean the highest expression of the Divine will, Jesus Christ. It is necessary, however, that we recognize that in the general sense the word may be used to describe any manifestation of God, inanimate or animate. For our purpose this more general definition will be used in the description of the lower manifestations of God, but the more specific meaning of the word is related particularly to the revelation of God through human beings, apostles, prophets, and so forth. The unique character of Jesus Christ has given to the word itself a unique meaning.

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## Chapter one

### The Need for Incarnation

The need for Incarnation may be variously stated. In particular I shall refer to two fields of thought in which the need for Incarnation is especially felt.

1. Religiously. There has always been, as far as we know, a tendency on man's part to materialize or objectify the object of his faith. Thus, the disciples, having learned much from Jesus



of the character of God, yet make their request of Him, "Lord,

1. shew us the Father". More will be said concerning this tendency in men's thinking later, when we trace the development of religion from its lowest to its highest forms. In the meantime we shall pass on to consider the second expression of the need for Incarnation.

2. Philosophically. The philosophic need is based upon the fact that man cannot grasp the Universal, at least in the beginning of his unreflective reactions to the Universe. He can only envision the universal in the particular. It follows logically, however, that if the Universal may be seen in the particular, then at least a partial knowledge of the Universal may be grasped by means of the particular object of one's faith.

This philosophical principle is not only a religious necessity, but it is also in harmony with all truly creative art. Inasmuch as artistic creation is more than an exact copy of nature, it is the embodiment of an unseen, universal reality behind Nature. Willard L. Sperry makes this comment (2) "The artist -- works by insight and imagination, and he always confines himself to particulars. He gazes intently at the actual fact, a flower in a stone wall, a daffodil by a lakeside, knowing that if only he can see deeply enough into it he will find there an incarnation of Reality" "Once he has seen the reality, and felt it deeply, he sets to work

John 14:8.

Willard L. Sperry. (Reality in Worship. P225. )





to fashion a form which will enable other men to see and feel what he has seen and felt ". According to this principle then, while primitive men cannot grasp in a clear conceptual way the universal or ultimate Reality of the Universe, he can dimly and vaguely sense or feel it. He can, in the early stages of his thinking, seek to approach that Reality through some concrete form.

That Outstanding religious philosopher, Edward Caird, has drawn attention to this tendency to particularize the Universal. "The Infinite is in the consciousness of the primitive, but he cannot rise to it. He translates in terms of particular, and sees God in fetishes and objects. (1) Again, in the same connection, he says "It (the universal) is beyond his reach in the sense that he can never comprehend it, nor even set it as a distinct object before his thought and imagination" (2). Referring to the brutal forms that primitive religion takes, Caird says, "Under the unsightliness and horror of his superstition, there is germinating a consciousness of that which is greater than himself, and greater than any object, and yet which is so close to him that he cannot neglect or evade it"(3)

From the foregoing it is apparent that the primitive savage may detect in Nature the presence of something not only objective, but, as Caird suggests, beyond both himself and Nature. Caird concludes his summary thus, "Every creature who is capable of the consciousness of an objective world, and of the consciousness of a self, is capable also of the consciousness of God. Or, to sum up? the whole matter in one word, every rational being as such is a religious being" (4)

Edward Caird. (Evolution of Religion. ) P 67 ff.

" " " " " P 76.

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" " " " " P 68.



Now it is essential in the completing of this picture, to realize that in a very real sense the natural world is a manifestation of God, and God's presence may certainly be perceived in the lower incarnations of himself. Plato was aware of this fact, and was driven by the very presence of the natural manifestation of God, to explain its presence while clinging to the transcendent view of God's person. George J. Blewett, writing of Plato, and the founding of Idealism, asks the question in considering Plato's philosophy, "How came this present world into being at all. How came the world of Ideas to go outside of itself, to go beyond its own completeness, and perfection, and become the source of another world?" (1) After quoting from Plato's "Timaeus" he answers the question, "it is of the very nature of the supreme Principle to communicate ~~itself~~, to impart to others of its own being and character and blessedness; so that the nature itself of the supreme principle is the ground of the existence of beings other than the supreme principle, and yet, sharing in its nature, and therefore, in its reality" (1). This conception, Blewett feels, is offered to very earnestly by Plato, and is "already present in the comparison of the Idea of God to the sun in the latest written section of the Republic, and also in the criticism of Anaxagoras in the Phaedo" (2) Still further, using the ideas of Plato as expressed in Timaeus as his basis, Blewett continues, "and with this view of the Timaeus, stated above, the view that the perfect God, being good, is led by His nature to communicate himself, and so becomes the author and father of the Universe, is made possible, not merely as a prophetic insight, but as the culmination of a reasoned Idealism" (3)



A somewhat similar conception is found in the teaching of Spinoza. Divergent as are their conceptions of Ultimate Reality, and its relation to the Universe, Plato and Spinoza seem to agree that the Ultimate Reality has manifested Himself in all Creation. In Eucken's interpretation of Spinoza's Philosophy, he says, "For him (Spinoza) matter and mind are not different things, but only different aspects of one and the same thing, only developments, presentations, existential manifestations of one and the same fundamental substance" (1) "Spinoza", says Eucken, "resolves the seeming opposition between the world and God". He quotes Spinoza further, "These are not different realities, but are related within the one and only reality as existence and essence, phenomenon and ultimate ground, nature as produce, and nature as producing power. Understood in this sense, God has no need to go out of Himself in order to work upon things, but all working is within His life and Essence. To use the technical phrase, 'He is the Immanent Cause of Things'". It is evident then, that according to Spinoza, the phenomenon, or material object, is a manifestation, or, in terms of this thesis, an incarnation of the substance of the Universe. Eucken, adding his own interpretation, says, "not only are simple and immutable laws at work through all the complexity of events, but the events themselves are, in the last resort, nothing else than unfoldings of the Divine Essence, temporal manifestations of the Eternal Being, wave upon wave in the ocean of Infinity" (1)

From the foregoing it is evident that there is agreement with regard to this matter at least, that the Ultimate Reality, whether or not called God, expresses Himself in the world in which





men have their being, and because of that the world becomes to them a partial interpretation of the very nature of the Creator of that world, or an Incarnation of Him. Even Herbert Spencer in his "First Principles", although dualistic and agnostic in his philosophy, yet reaches a point in his dealing with Ultimate Reality and its relation to the world of observable facts where his statement almost parallels those of Plato and Spinoza. (1) His statement with regard to the development of religion concludes thus, "Consequently, the final outcome of that speculation commenced by the primitive man is that the power manifested throughout the world distinguished as material, is the same power which in ourselves wells up under the form of consciousness". Or again to quote at the same passage, "Amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain one absolute certainty, that man is ever in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." Edward Caird, after quoting this section, makes this comment, "All Things" corresponds to the world of matter, life and mind, and the connection between these two realms is indicated by the word 'Proceed' That would seem to indicate a flow or unfolding or self-communication which bridges the gulf, and breaks down the dualistic conception, and makes the 'all things' in a world of visible existence and outflow a real expression of Unknown and Eternal Reality. This is clearly hinted at in the highest or last stage in the activity of this Eternal Energy, as stated by Spencer." (2)

Herbert Spencer. (First Principles ) P 659.

Edward Caird. (Evolution of Religion. P 145.



It would seem clear then, that Spencer is driven to acknowledge the Universe as an expression or incarnation of his unknown God. Caird's conclusion in regard to this matter is that the Unity which connects the subject and the object, that is, the self and the not-self, is a "higher principle" joining the two in relatedness one to the other, so that both subject and object are expressions and incarnations of Reality. (1)

From the foregoing it is evident that the thinking of these philosophers has as its basis a consciousness of a Supreme Reality, called by various names, who gives expression to His nature in the world He has made, and who may be perceived by men through that manifestation.

Clothed too in the beauty of poetic expression this philosophic necessity of Incarnation is revealed. I mention but three of a large number whose poetry reveals this basis conception of God's presence in the world He has made.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, walking one day with Canon Farrer in the poet's garden, noticed that the Canon stepped upon a flower whose stem had been previously broken. Tennyson picked the flower up, and was examining it casually when the Canon remarked that although this flower was a comparatively insignificant thing, especially in its now crushed and broken state, it was nevertheless related still to the Reality of the world. This statement led to the inspiration for the lines:-

Edward Caird. (Evolution of Religion) P 27.



"Flower in crannied wall  
I pluck you out of the cranny  
I hold you here in my hand  
Little flower, root and all  
But if I know what you are  
Root and all, and all in all  
I would know what God and man is" (1)

For him the meaning of the Universal lay enfolded in this crushed flower, a tiny incarnation of God.

Wordsworth, in his "Tintern Abbey" voices the ecstasy of the realization that God is present in His Universe. Says he:-

" And I have felt  
A Presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man (2)

Again, in his "Intimations of Immortality" is this sense of God's disclosure in the world expressed.

"Not for these I raise  
The song of thanks and praise  
But for those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things  
Fallings from us, vanishings  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realized  
High instincts before which our mortal nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised" (3)

From the above it is evident that Wordsworth sees both Nature and man as streaming from God's will, an evidence of his presence, and a revelation of His own Nature.

Browning too has something to say of this realization that God is revealed in the world in his poem "Saul".

Alfred Lord Tennyson. "Flower in crannied wall"  
Wordsworth. William. "Tintern Abbey"  
" " "Intimations of Immortality"





Having described the recovery of Saul from his affliction through the music of David, he describes the scene of David sitting between Saul's knees, and looking longingly into the face he loved, feeling his own helplessness to do anything more, yet feeling too that something more ought still to be done. (1)

"Then the truth came upon me. No harp more- no song more outbroke,  
I have gone the whole round of Creation; I saw and I spoke;  
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain  
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork - returned Him again  
His Creation's approval or censure; I spoke as I saw,  
I report as a man may of God's work - all's love, yet all's law"

Browning puts further into the mouth of David:-

"I believe it: tis thou God who givest, 'tis I who receive  
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe  
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to  
my prayer  
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.  
From thy will stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread  
Sabaoth"

"From thy will stream the worlds, life and Nature" Browning says.

This Universe in all its parts, speaks to him of its Creator, is a real embodiment of His presence, an incarnation of God's will.

From these passages it is evident that the Philosophical necessity of Incarnation can find its expression in many and varied ways.

One further word as I pass on to consider the religious necessity of the Incarnation concept. In the realm of careful scientific investigation this necessity is also felt. However, since the study deals rather with particular objects and the laws governing them rather than with an interpretation of their relations one to another, and to the world, the emphasis is neither so direct or so emphatic.

Robert Browning. "Saul"





It is to be expected therefore that in the larger view of the universe, the emphasis upon values, upon personality, and the interpretation of material existence, in short, in the religious field, there should be a much more definite emphasis upon the necessity of Incarnation. The work of the scientist, and that of the theologian carries each into different activity, and in a different direction. The scientist, dealing principally with detail, has little opportunity to take the larger view, and because of that, does not meet the problems of this larger view. Our approach to the Religious expression of this necessity is of a somewhat different order then, than is that to the philosophical necessity with which I have dealt.

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## Chapter Two.

### The religious necessity of Incarnation.

It has been already affirmed that man, seeking to understand the Universal, is driven to objectify, and to consider the universal in terms of the particular. While Animism is regarded by some as the most primitive expression of this human tendency, there are those who state that there are pre-Animistic beliefs and expressions that merit consideration. In writing of the Arunta tribes in Central Australia, William Kelly Wright says:—"It is surprising that among (1) these peoples we find none of the religious ideas that at first seem fundamental. There are neither priests or temples. It <sup>therefore</sup> ~~there~~ has been said that these peoples belong to the pre-religious state, that their culture antedates the appearance of religion among mankind. However, it is more accurate to say that religion exists among them in an undifferentiated form, since, as we shall see, they possess, to say the least, some of the germs of religion as it exists among the higher races". Basing his research upon the previous work of Spencer and Gillen, Wright mentions the crude life, devoid of clothing, devoid too of adequate shelter, because the tribe members are unable to construct shelters, or to make clothing. Their initiation ceremonies seem to be directed toward the perpetuating of tribal lore and ritual. They feel that some mysterious influence is at work through these ceremonies for "the natives themselves say that the ceremonies have the effect of strengthening all who pass through them". "It, (the ceremony) imparts courage and wisdom, makes the men more kindly natured and less apt to quarrel". Again:-

Wright W. K. "A Student's Philosophy of Religion" P 10.



"That some kind of force is envisioned behind all this ceremony seems certain." He comments on this awareness of a mysterious force thus. "He probably dimly feels that some sort of mysterious impersonal force operates in the initiation ceremonies, and transforms the boys both physiologically and mentally into men" (1) While it is evident that this force has not been intelligently defined, it is felt to exist and to exert a profound influence upon the tribe. It is something vivid, potent, and uncanny, the more to be feared because unknown. The particular object used to objectify this force they call a Churinga. It may be a piece of wood or other object, either in its natural state, or carved and inscribed upon. This Churinga, supposed to be the dwelling place of the mysterious force, is carefully preserved in a cave, and watched over as a sacred thing. It is interesting at this point to observe that from this type of beginning has arisen on other occasions the elaborate ceremonial and priesthood of higher religions. Wright sums up "In a sense , therefore, Australian religion involves a dim, hardly conscious feeling of the presence of something supernatural, something that is not human, and yet is not material, but which is potent in the life of man, and which is efficient in working him good if enlisted on his side, and which would work him harm if law and custom were disregarded." (1) While as we have previously mentioned, these beliefs are not properly classified as religious, since they have no vital relation to the worship of a supernatural Being, they are nevertheless the substitutes for truly religious observances to them, and as such may be classified as religious.

William Kelly Wright. (A student's Philosophy of Religion) P14.





Briefly to sum up this Arunta tribal belief, it is evident that they are aware of a mysterious force, and believe that that force is at least in some measure incarnated in the object used for their observance, the Churinga, as it is called. This then, at the lowest stage of belief, perhaps rightly called pre-religious.

At a higher stage the religion of the Todas has comparable ceremonial rites, which also have no right to be called religious, but which yet, as in the previous instance serve the purpose of truly religious practices. Men are specially trained to properly conduct the ceremonies of the tribe, and occupy the position occupied by priests in true religious ceremonies. The ceremonies themselves are designed to preserve the values of the indwelling spirit or force which inhabits the cows from which come their invaluable milk supply. Where the force resided in the former instance in an inanimate object in this case it is thought to reside in the cow itself. Care is therefore taken that the strength of the mysterious force shall be enlisted upon their side. The spirit is incarnated in the cow.

We proceed now to a consideration of those more religious beliefs which may be considered to fall into the category of Animism. Animism defined is "The doctrine of the existence of a soul or spirit as distinguished from matter". It is the belief that within all material manifestations or objects dwells the spirit of the Universe, a kind of animating Essence. The lines cannot be very finely drawn between a pre-Animistic and a more truly Animistic conception. The distinction lies rather in that the one force is a blind, impersonal power, the other an animating spirit.



Edward Caird Rightly says In referring to the consciousness of God among men, "It is not always easy to detect the germs or imperfect forms of such consciousness in all the forms of religion which have appeared in different ages and nations". (1) I shall use two examples of the more truly Animistic belief, that expressed in Fetishism, and that in Totemism.

In the larger category of Animism the term describes the existence of an animating spirit which manifests itself in Nature. The term itself was coined by George Ernst Stahl in the 18th Century to describe his philosophy of a "world soul" or universal essence. The word is taken from the Latin "Anima" or breath, which had within it some of the Greek conception of "Breath" as a synonym for "Life". Expressed in terms of Fetishism, a particular object is selected, which object is supposed to be inhabited by the world spirit, and is the incarnation in small degree of that larger world. The Encyclopaedia Britannica speaks of the fetish as a god-house, and mentions that as such it is hardly to be distinguished from an idol.(2) The inhabiting spirit may be conceived of as "a mystical agency to effect the physiological growth of boys into men, in the case of initiation ceremonies". As a case in point, something of the work of Bishop Codrington may be mentioned. Having studied the Melanesian beliefs very carefully, the Bishop reported,<sup>(3)</sup> "The Melanesian mind is entirely possessed by the belief that in a supernatural power or influence, called almost universally 'Mana', (a force) which to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of man, outside of the common processes of nature; it is present in the

Edward Caird. Evolution of Religion P 30. (2) 14th Ed. Vol 9 P 202.  
William Kelly Wright. (A Student's Philosophy of Religion) P. 25



atmosphere of life, attaches itself to persons and to things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operation" (1) "Thus all conspicuous success is proof that a man has mana"

Lest this conception of Mana be considered as identical with a belief in a supernatural force, which we would call God, Bishop Codrington continues, "The notion of a supreme Being is altogether foreign to them, or indeed of any being occupying a very elevated place in their world". If Mana has been thought to have been present in more than ordinary manifestations in a man, as for instance in giving him unusual prowess in fighting, or in agricultural pursuits, his remains, or a part thereof, might be preserved, so that his Mana might be passed on to the tribe. A very brave warrior, Ganindo, was treated with this respect, to bring success to the tribe.

Wright observes that the same conception of a more than ordinary force is given the same place in tribal thinking among the Pygmies of Africa, under the name of "Oudah", and among the North Americans as Manitou, and that something of the same conception finds a place in highly civilized peoples in the use of objects, such as a rabbit's foot, a garment of an admired person, or a charm of some other type. (2) Wright further suggests that the explanation of the fact that persons are sure of having received some new power, or Mana from an observance or from contact with a special Mana-containing object, lies in three possibilities, that physical well-being may coincide with a ceremonial observance, that a man of strong character might impart, during the proceedings,





something of his own personality, and influence, and, lastly, that the ceremonies themselves, as for example, war dances, initiation ceremonies, etc might conceivably impart some psychic force to the participants. In any case, the desire to preserve the power of the spirit thought to dwell in the sacred object gives an indication of the belief that the object itself is an incarnation of the spirit from which Mana is thought to be transmitted to the tribe. Spencer and Gillen, on the basis of the observations made in Central Australia, have this to say "As amongst all savage tribes, the Australian native is bound hand and foot by custom. What his fathers did before him, he must do" (1)

As to the value of the beliefs in Mana, Wright points out that while they are shot through with superstition and delusion, they yet provide the impulse to the savage to probe his subconscious depths, to call out powers and strength of which otherwise he would have remained ignorant. This Mana conception, stripped of its superstition, and clothed with a reverence for God, becomes a belief in the possibility of the Divine influence which may be transmitted to a man as he worships.

Now, all this belief in Mana related itself to physical objects, and it is therefore natural that there will be in the mind of the savage a belief that the Mana inhabits various objects, trees, stones, plants, and animals. The fetish was particularly supposed to contain Mana of the god whose name it bore. Offerings of meat and drink were made to assure the benevolence of the





indwelling spirit. The possession of a fetish was therefore supposed to ward off sickness, or to give success in war, or perchance to bring abundant crops. Where more ornate, and supposedly, more useful fetishes were employed, ceremonial feasts in their honor were sometimes given, and the worship became almost the worship of a god. In any case, the step up from the belief in Mana, with the use of the dwelling place of that mysterious force, was not far removed from the worship of the god-house as a god. Thus, this whole belief in Fetishes is an attempt to use objects as the incarnations of the mysterious power, felt, but not understood. By this means too the Universal is particularized in the object.

This same conception is demonstrated also in Totemism. The definition of Totemism, given by Barton, is as follows:- "Totemism is the name given to the system of tribal subdivision, denoted by Totems. Totemism is a kind of imaginary social alliance offensive and defensive, between a group of human beings and the class of animals or plants to which the totem belonged." (1). Durkheim, writing in the Encyclopaedia Britannica adds "Man realized the presence of a group or clan spirit, and symbolizes that spirit by a totem animal, bird, etc. Hence the totemic symbols are sacred, rather than the totem species itself." (2) It was supposed by a tribe that their original ancestor, perhaps



a bird or animal, was an incarnation of the tribal deity. Therefore, by careful protection of the totem object the spirit of the tribe incarnated still in the object, is preserved. This treasuring of the tribal totem takes form in ceremonil observances, often in sacrificial ceremonies, and the devotee eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the totem animal, believing that he thereby partakes of the vital power of the god of the tribe. Social customs evolve from this belief, including marriage provisions especially, burial practices, etc. The following summary throws light upon these practices:- "Among tribes of Central Australia, all those important happenings, such as the origin of man, and his customs, and the recurrence of death and birth, are well explained in totemic terms, for in the olden days there were only totemic beings, the Emu, Grub, and so on, half-human, half animal in form. Those spirits were creative, and made the stock of souls which have ever since been the souls of human beings by continual re-incarnations, these souls themselves being totemic in nature. Birth is thus due to the entry of one of these spirits into the womb of a woman, death due to its departure from the body" (1) Between incarnations, it appears thrt these spirits abide in certain centers, known as totem-centers, and these places are usually used for totem ceremonies. By these means the tribe seeks to preserve the link between itself and the original spirit from which it sprang. The tribe itself is felt to be the incarnation of the original clan spirit.



The Religious necessity as shown in Arab Tribes.

In a slightly advanced stage from the foregoing, the sacrificial rites of the Arabs amply demonstrate the idea of the incarnation of a tribe spirit in a sacred animal. In the blood rites it is evident that the desire is to transmit this indwelling tribe spirit from the sacred animal, which is an incarnation of that spirit, to each member of the tribe. The sacred camel is bound alive upon the altar, and the leader of the blood rites begins a slow march around the altar. When three times, the group has marched around the altar, slowly chanting the ceremonial song, they suddenly stop both the march and song, and the leader advances and draws first blood. The others then rush in upon the victim, and "Fall upon the victim with their swords, hacking off pieces of the quivering flesh. The plain meaning of this is that the victim was devoured before its life had left the still warm blood and flesh" (1) Evidently the Arabs believe that by this means the spirit of the clan god, incarnated in the sacred animal is transmitted to them as life.





### Chapter Three

#### The Incarnation belief in higher religions.

##### 1. Hinduism.

Hinduism presents Incarnation as lying at the very center of its religious belief. Speaking of India's three ~~hundred~~ hundred millions of people, John Leslie Johnston says, "The majority of them are Hindu by religion. The main bulk of these are men whose practical religion consists of some form of faith in a divine being who appears on earth as incarnate" (1) There is a Supreme Being, manifested in the world as Vishnu. Vishnu's incarnations are quite numerous, and are called avatars. To Vishnu in his incarnations religion attaches itself. Salvation lies in worship of Vishnu. The adoration of Vishnu, "Bhakti," as it is called, brings eternal, individual conscious existence at the feet of the Adorable, Vishnu. Unbelief, selfishness, etc., are hindrances to this adoration, but seem to have no ethical expression toward other men. The "wheel of rebirth" brings persons back by a continual series of re-incarnations, each calculated to permit to draw the devotee closer to Vishnu. The belief in "Karma" is closely coupled with this set of beliefs. It is the belief "that purposed action in past lives determines the present state, and in present life insures future incarnations" (2) Having outlined the general beliefs of the Hindu faith, Johnson declares, "it involves a real belief in the possibility and indeed necessity, of divine incarnation, and a personal attitude of loyalty and love to God Incarnate" (2) It must be noted here, however, that in no sense does this involve the conception of the divine taking the form of man.



Rather does man become the medium of revelation. None of the moral qualities attaching to the character of God are necessarily needed in a man through whom the revelation is to come, and in some cases immoral practices were compatible with revelation. The revelation was considered valid only for the age in which it was given, and was therefore neither final or complete.

It is significant that the idea of suffering is completely absent from the conception of incarnation in the Hindu religion. Salvation comes as men see God, but God seems not to be identified with them in any sacrifice of Himself. So far then from resolving the presence of pain as a conflict with the idea of goodness and kindness in connection with God, the Hindu religion avoids the whole issue, becoming thereby weak and shallow. The caste system has flourished, with all its grievous injustice especially against women and children, and no thought of incarnation carries with it any suggestion of alleviation of their distresses. The fact that comparatively recently some effort has been made to rectify some of these glaring mistakes in conduct is a tribute to the challenge which the impact of Christianity has brought, than an indication of any real perception of human need on the part of the Hindu religionists. God incarnate as love and mercy seems to be seeking a place in decadent Hinduism.

## 2. Buddhism.

In Buddhism we have perhaps one of the clearest indications of the necessity of incarnation in the religious



thinking of mankind. Referring to this, Johnson says "It seems at least to show the bankruptcy of pure Buddhism and the inevitable trend of its religious feeling in a direction very alien from that in which it originally started" (1) It will be recalled that the original Buddha, Gautama, arrived at the conclusion that since sorrow followed from desire, cessation of desire was the ideal to be sought, and would bring the devotee to Nirvana, the state of nothingness. However, by the time the Council of Ashoka was held, in 250 B.C. just about four hundred years after the work of Gautama was done, speculation was indulged in as to whether or not this Buddha was a man, or whether perhaps a manifestation of a supreme Spirit, who had manifested Himself in previous times, and in other persons. "This development seems to have gone on gradually, until in the True Lotus, a book of the time of Kaniska (70) A. D. we find the Mahayana doctrine standing for a Buddha who can hardly be distinguished from the avatars, or Incarnations of the Highest, which we find in Brahmanism; ----- Nirvana also has so far altered its character as to allow the Buddha, (or at least his ~~Bodhisattva form~~ Bodhisattva form) -- to be conscious and gracious to his worshippers. (2)

This same religious necessity seems to have brought a conception taken either directly from Christianity, or perhaps from Judaism, of a Messiah, a future Buddha. Even some idea of a pre-existence began to attach itself to the first Buddha, and





the expectation began to arise that this first Buddha would also come again in a final manifestation. Even the moral attribute of kindness was ascribed to the Buddha. Johnson summarizes this trend, "The idea of an eternal and infinite God makes itself felt, although all moral attributes are relegated to the Buddhas, who are somehow regarded as emanations from, or at least subordinate to, the Supreme" (1) These emanations take two forms, forms which remind one of the philosophy of Philo Judaeus. There are the heavenly Buddhas, and their earthly manifestations, somewhat as the Judaistic patriarch was the earthly manifestation of the heavenly principle. These earthly manifestations remained to help men upon the earth, according to the Buddhist belief.

Even the belief in the "wheel of rebirth" which formerly resembled the belief in Hinduism, gave place to another, corresponding closely to the Medieval idea of Heaven and Hell, wherein reward and punishment was to be meted out according to one's works on earth. All of these changes are indications of the deep craving for "One who should be All in All, and for ever, Alpha and Omega, Eternal, yet Incarnate, and to come " (2). In short, the manifestation in Buddha was a satisfactory emanation for his period in the world's history, but the follower of Buddhism felt the deep need of something, someone to meet his struggles, and to solve his problems. His religious wanderings only pointed to his felt need of divine companionship, such as men found in Christ.

Johnson, John Leslie. (Some Alternatives to Jesus Christ) P29.  
(2) P59.





### 5. The Jewish Religious Belief.

Referring back briefly to the Totemic practices of other religious groups, one finds difficulty in distinguishing between Totemic ceremonial, and some of the religious practices of the Hebrew people. Animals of various kinds were chosen for sacrifice, and the use of others was condemned. While it would seem as though they had ceased to think of the indwelling force which they desired to enlist for their own aid, as an impersonal force, the idea of the spiritual force as indwelling within objects had certainly not disappeared. While the leaders seem to have had a clear conception in most cases as to the personality of God as being that of a Universal Creator and sustainer, yet they found difficulty in leading their people away from the older practices with their beliefs centering around particular objects, than around universal conceptions.

It is suggested by Barton, that perhaps even the names of tribes had their origin in totemic terms. "Leah" means, for instance, "wild cow" and "Rachel" an "Ewe". This at least implies that the Leah tribes may have been cattle-raisers, and the Rachel tribes sheep-raisers. (1). That the religion of the early tribes did not differ materially from that of the other nomadic groups would seem to be substantiated by Barton, as follows: "Since the primitive Semitic pillars, and asheras (wooden posts) circumcision, the herem or ban, and the law of blood revenge were perpetuated by them into much later times, it is probable that in other respects their religion was similar to that of other Barton. George A. (The religions of the World) P.59.



nomadic Semites." (1) The idea of the mysterious force in the world, whose help might be enlisted for purposes of agriculture and especially of war, finally emerged in the conception of "Yahweh", who was thought to be able to become incarnate in many forms, about which something will be said later. This "Yahweh" was symbolized in the presence of the elaborately carved and decorated "Ark" which box was thought to contain the power if not the person of the God. If they carried the "ark" into battle they felt fairly sure of victory, but were almost surely defeated when they neglected to do so. Since this God's favor was especially toward the Jewish people, he became a destructive force when others took possession of him.

With the varying fortunes of the Chosen people carrying them into many lands where a king ruled, the idea of the embodiment of their God in terms of a king became popular, and a special anointing ceremony seemed to convey some of the presence of God to the King's person. For example, his body must not be touched, even though he might justly deserve death. He became God's representative. With the growing conception of the spiritual personality of God, the belief seemed to gain popularity that God would from time to time appear, in any one of many manifestations, other than as king. Even from before the time of the kings then, this "messenger" was apparently identical with God.



He came to Hagar in the wilderness to comfort her and to tell her of the honor which should be hers. (1) Three men appear to Abraham from the Lord, to tell him of the coming son, and to warn of the destruction of Sodom. There seems to be no distinction between God and the men, though they appear to be separate beings. (2) Two angels come to warn Lot of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and possess the power to bring blindness upon the people, and they definitely say they will destroy the cities. (3). Again, Jacob wrestles with a "man" who is evidently possessed of the power to grant the "Blessing" he seeks. (4). The "Angel of the Lord" appears to Gideon, giving assurance of the divine call and of Gideon's mission to the people (5). This "Messenger" was called by the Jewish people, "Memra", and the word indicates, according to the Jewish encyclopaedia, "The Word, in the sense of a creative and directive force of God, manifested in the world of matter or mind". Thus we have, in Psalm 33, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens created", and again "He spake and it was done" etc. The Memra takes the place of God in the Targum. Thus, Deuteronomy 13:19 "I shall require it of him" becomes in the Targum, "My word shall require it of him". Something of the war conception is found in Wisdom 18:15 "Thine almighty word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne as a fierce man of war!"

Gen 16:7. cf. (2) Gen 18:10. Gen 19:1 & 13. (4) Gen 32:24.  
(5) Judges 6:11.





Out of the conception of God as being manifested in human form to come to the assistance of His people, there began to arise a new idea, having its final expression in what we now call the "Apocalyptic Messiah". "The instrument by whom God's Kingdom is to be established in Israel and in the world." (1) James Crichton says "It is to be noted that "Messiah" as a special title, is never applied in the O.T. to the unique king of the future, unless perhaps in Daniel 9:25, where "Messiah Prince is used, a difficult passage, the interpretation of which is very uncertain. (1). The idea of the Messiah is, however, inseparable from the wider hope that runs through the O.T. On the ground of the promises of God as to their unique position in the nations of the world, the Jews, even in defeat, seemed unable to imagine themselves as being finally overthrown. At first the king, as previously mentioned, became to them the Lord's anointed, whose person was sacred, and whose word to them became the very word of God. Finally the impression was given that of the line of David the final manifestation should come. With the conceptions of this coming Messiah more clearly outlined by Isaiah, Micah, and Hosea, it finally appeared that if this was not to be actually God in human form, there was at least to be a person so much indwelt by God's spirit that he would be to them as God, and should exercise over them a beneficent and fatherly rule. Along these two main lines then did the belief take its form, that of the Apocalyptic and that of the Davidic Messiah.



With the passing of Isaiah and his contemporary fellow prophets, the vision of a Messiah seemed to fade into obscurity, and was not referred to at all by Zephaniah, Nahum or Habakkuk. It revived, however in the ministry of Jeremiah, and of Ezekiel. Jeremiah, having reaffirmed that this ruler would come from David's line, calls him the "Righteous Branch" who is to be called "Jehovah our righteousness." (1)

In Ezekiel he is referred to as the coming one "whose right it is" as Jehovah's servant David, to be prince and king forever over a united people. (2). It was to be expected that the Dispersion should kill much of the enthusiasm about the coming ruler, but each successive upturn in the fortunes of the Israelitish people brought a resurgence of the Messianic expectation.

Descriptions of the Messiah differ with changing times and new personalities to whom a new vision comes. Unique in its description is the prophecy of Zechariah, which pictures the new ruler as coming in lowly form, sitting upon an ass, ruling only by righteousness and peace. In him were to be united the functions of both priest and prophet, though in a higher degree than had been previously known. This incarnation of God is to make access to God easy (3) and is to be a prophet to the people.

Gradually the conception of this Incarnate person as the "Servant of Jehovah" began in later years to occupy a prominent place in the people's thinking. While it is true that many of the

Jer. 23:5 ff. - 30:9. (2). Ezek. 34:23 & 37:24. (3) Jer. 30:9 - 21.



of the conception in Isaiah's writings were made with reference to the Nation and not to a person, from those writings the idea nevertheless emerged of an incarnation of God who should sum up in his person the qualities of life of Ideal Israel.

A changing picture is portrayed with the progressive thinking of the three Isaiahs. The first combines the austere morality with the separateness and lofty position of God, and brought into prominence the lofty character of this coming ruler. (1)

The second Isaiah finds the ruler sharing the sufferings of the people, and identifying himself with their needs. (2) Third Isaiah brings in the conception of world leadership on the part of Israel, with a high moral and spiritual tone challenging the people to turn to God, and is ready for his final manifestation upon the earth. (3)

A new note is sounded in the history of the Israelites with the definitely apocalyptic expressions which followed the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes. In the prophecy of Daniel the Messianic hope girds on its sword, and gives its allegiance to a superhuman leader "Like unto the son of man" who comes with the clouds of heaven, and is brought before the Ancient of Days, and receives an imperishable kingdom, that all peoples should serve him. Here too enters the belief in the pre-existence of the Messiah. (4) Many apocalypses were written at this time, and,

Barton, George A. (Religions of the World) PG3. (2) P. 73.  
(1). Isaiah. 56 - 66. (4) Daniel 7:13.





after the custom of the day, were ascribed to great leaders of the past, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Isaiah, Baruch, Isaiah, Ezra, Daniel, Solomon, and Sibyl. Throughout these writings the thought of the nature of this coming incarnation of God became clearer, and rather naturally brought a division among the people as to whether the Messiah should be of the Davidic order, or should be the Apocalyptic Messiah, descending with all God's power, to conquer for Israel, and to destroy her enemies.

Through the Accession of Simon the Maccabee as the High Priest and Prince the division became a cleavage into respective groups. The Chasidim, "Pious" ones, refuted Simon's claims, and concentrated upon the devotion to the law, and its manifold observances. The Messianic ideal suffered during this time, but the political aspect of Jewish life made a profound impression upon the thinking of all groups. Out of the melting pot of these difficulties there came into the hearts of all the assurance that God would manifest himself in the "Coming One" about whom John the Baptist spoke. (1) Just what the Pharisees expected it would be difficult to say since the moral aspects of Jesus challenge were not to their liking. That the common people heard him gladly indicates that Jesus was to them at least the fulfillment of their expectations. That even so they were looking for demonstrations along the line of the pattern of the Apocalyptic Messiah there can be no doubt. At the transitional





stage, with the various shades of Jewish belief meeting Greek and Roman cynicism concerning their religion, and with philosophy of all kinds demanding a hearing there appeared a Philosopher and religionist, Philo Judeus. Upon the basis of his thinking was laid much of the new Christian thought, and to a consideration of his philosophy we now turn.



#### Chapter Four.

##### Philo Judaeus.

Philo Judaeus was born in Alexandria in the year 20.B. C. He died about the year 40 A.D. He was therefore, a contemporary of Jesus. He was one of those Jews whose ancestors had been sent, during the Dispersion, to other lands. In his new homeland, in Alexandria, Philo had been more than usually affected by the study of Greek Philosophy. Having the background of Jewish monotheism, Philo is described as "a Greek Humanist by higher education and professional study, an ally of the Roman governing classes" (1) His position in the period of transition in thinking from the old acceptance of tradition to the new approach by reason, was unique. "Philo's prominence as a figure in the world of thought, and as an authority for the general culture of New Testament times is out of all proportion to the fragmentary information available about his external career. Contemporary currents, subtle as they were, perplexing as they still remain, met and fused in his person. Hence, his value as an index to the temperament of the period cannot well be over-stated (2)

Three streams of thought met and merged in his person, and flowed forth from him not necessarily as a unified system of thought now, but at least with the suggestion of a relationship between each separate conception. The stream of Platonic thought brought the weight of the philosophy of the Transcendent God.



Stoicism presented the claims of Pantheism, and identified God with His World. Judaism brought the claims of the moral nature and righteous personality of God, and assumed righteousness as the very basis of deity. That there could be no real fusion of these divergent beliefs is to be expected. One marvels that Philo could even have explained away, if not explained, the difficulties which these three expressions of Deity presented.

Plato had, it would seem, begun with the declaration of Socrates, that as mind in the body is invisible, yet is the directing force of the body; so the Invisible Spirit is the directing force of the Universe, unseen, but powerful. Plato added the conception of "Ideas" as the permanent factors in the world, connecting the Transcendent God with the second principle in the Universe, Matter. Matter was changing, and temporal in its changing aspects, but Ideas were eternal. The soul of man stands between the idea and matter. This soul "is incorporeal, and ever the same, like ideas, but spread abroad throughout the world, and moving by its own original motion" (1) "Deity coincides with the idea of "Good", and the belief in providence with the conviction that the world is the work of the Reason, and the copy of the Idea" Therefore, the natural habitat of the soul being the higher world, one must seek to release the soul from the "Chains of the body". The belief in the pre-existence of the

(1) Barton. C.A. (Religions of the world) P 259.





souls of men was undoubtedly one of the basic beliefs from which arose Philo's conception of Incarnation, and Pre-existence of Jesus Christ, as outlined later by John.

Stoicism went to the opposite extreme in its conception of deity. "God", said the Stoic, "is not a being outside the framework of the Universe, and apart from it, but one who interpenetrates its every part" (1) "Therefore, to live in harmony with Nature was to live in harmony with God". God as a remote personality was no longer a necessary belief, and <sup>the</sup> idea of God as identifying himself with the world he had created became a reasonable conception to conjure with. Transcendence, and Immanence, Platonic philosophy and the Stoic conception of deity were ready for the work of Philo. Philo accomplished the "Fusion" of these two opposite conceptions by the introduction of the allegorical method. There are in the world, Philo stated, not only physical manifestations, but the thought shadows of those manifestations. Moses, for example is not only an historical figure, but is the embodiment of the conception of Law. Thus, Philo explained, there is the Jewish manifestation of God, which can only be explained properly with reference to the Greek philosophic conception of transcendence. Each, then, is part of the whole, and necessary to the other. While it would seem that belief in the personality of God as righteous, and loving, his Fatherhood of



ankind, were in the consciousness of Philo, the outlines of such a conception of God were never clearly outlined. "That God is" Philo was quite sure. "What he is no one can really tell" The term "Logos" took the place of the Platonic "Idea" as the connecting link between God and his world. The Logos was to Philo the Shadow of God, as the Hellenistic "Word" is the shadow of the deed. God in the Logos was expressed as not only internal and indwelling, but as external and mediating. He partakes of the divine nature only, but mingles with men and conveys to them the knowledge of God.

Man was to Philo, a partaker of the rational nature of God, but is chained by the body to the world. Man then, must crush the flesh and its desires, and escape from the "Prison-house of the body". To a selected few the possibility of a fusion with God was quite possible, and harmony with God, an incomprehensible mystery to the multitude, was felt to be possible to the "Instructed" (The influence of the "Republic" of Plato, with its upper class of society, and its multitude at the other end of the scale seems to cast its shadow here).

Thus did Philo lay the foundation for at least a partial understanding by the Jew of Greek philosophy of His God, and at the same time he interpreted the Jewish religion to the Greek. He laid too the broad foundation of the Logos philosophy which reached its high point in the Gospel of John. To a brief consideration of that philosophy we now proceed.



## Chapter Five.

### Incarnation in the Synoptics and John's Gospel.

It is perhaps best that we view the later development of the Johannine theology on the background of the Synoptic Gospels, from which writings the Logos conception came, at least from the religious side. Two expressions are used to designate the position of Jesus. He is called "Son of God," and "Son of Man". The first of these, while seeming to indicate especially his divinity, is actually applying to Jesus the title which had been used a good deal previously, in the O.T. Only once did Jesus use the term, as applied to himself, but when others used it of Him he accepted the designation. The term "Son of God", had been previously used in the book of Job. (1) where the "sons of God" came to present themselves. It had been used too to describe the Hebrew Nation, where Jehovah says to Pharaoh "Israel is my Son, my first born" (2). Particularly had the title been used in reference to a king of Israel, in his position as representative of the nation before God. The Lord tells Nathan that "Solomon shall be my Son, and I will be father to Solomon" (3). At the coronation of a King, Psalm 2. Announced is an oracle from heaven "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" (4). In ~~the~~ this 1st category Jesus seems properly to be seen. At the Annunciation the angel says "That which is born shall be called the Son of God". At Caesarea Philippi.

Joh 3:1. (1) Job 1:6. (2) Ex 4:22. (3) 2 Samuel 7:14. (4) Psalm 2:7.



According to the record of Matthew, Peter states that Jesus is the Messiah, and is too the Son of God.

It seems clear that the title was given a new meaning by Jesus, as he permitted the disciples to make use of it, and heard it used by others. In the final commission he asserts, "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth" When previously he had been asked as to whether or not he was the son of God, he boldly assented that he was. To the Apostle Paul the term "Son of God" seemed to have special meaning by its association as the title of Jesus. In Acts it is stated:- "and straightway in the synagogue he proclaimed Jesus that he is the Son of God"(1) Again, in the letter to the Romans Paul states "Concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared to be the Son of God with power, even Jesus Christ our Lord" (2). Further confirmation of this new meaning being attached to the term is seen in the epistle to the Hebrews, wherein the very theme of the book itself is to reveal the equality of Christ with God. (3) The Book of Revelation too gives to the Lord Jesus Christ the honor of sitting at the right hand of God. (4).

In the Gospel of John that conception seems to reach its highest expression. The Prologue brings the Logos doctrine of Philo into prominence, and expresses the belief that Jesus was present at the beginning of the creative processes, pre-existent

Acts 9:30. (1) Romans 1:1-14. (2) Epistle to Hebrews. (3) Rev 3:18.





before the foundations of the world. All Creation was bound up in Him, John states, and "without him was not anything made that was made". The Idea or "word" of God is clothed with human flesh, and descends upon the earth, not alone as the representative of God, but the very personification of God. This is not alone a King, but the "only begotten Son of God". Thus the idea of representation introduced in the Synoptic Gospels takes this further step in the Logos Philosophy of John. Jesus executes judgements (1) He has life in himself, and quickeneth whom he will (2). He gives eternal life to men. (3) Jesus states that all that he has given men has come from God, and that those works which he has done God taught him to do, and those things which he has said, God told him to say. (4)

The Second designation of Jesus is "Son of Man". It was the expression which Jesus used concerning himself, perhaps because it had the advantage of revealing to those who understood its meaning, who Jesus really was, and at the same time it guarded his identity until the time for its manifestation should arrive. While the term had been used casually in several Psalms. (5) the more appropriate meaning which may have been intended by Jesus is to be found in Ezekiel and in Daniel. In Daniel, the final Kingdom of the five surveyed by the writer is given to one whose

John 5:22. (2) John 5:26-31. (3) John 10:10. (4) John 5:19 & 14:10.  
(5) Psalms 8:4 and 80:17.



"Dominion shall be an everlasting which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (1) This conception seems implied as Jesus states to His enemies "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (2) Or again, this expression in Daniel seems echoed when we read "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (3) "Who is this Son of Man"? the people ask of Jesus (4) His reply expresses his idea of equality with God, and places his work and that of God upon the same footing. "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness" (5).

From this standpoint then it appears that the Spirit of God, pre-existent in the world, takes this form to reveal something more to men of the nature of God, and Jesus becomes to men God on earth. His Kingly estate is merged with the sufferings of men, and the highest expression of the relationship of God to men in Christ is expressed in terms of self-denial and service, even in the most menial of tasks, and finally in the Cross. The spirit of Philo seems to breathe through the writings of John, for the Transcendent God, unable to communicate Himself, comes in the Idea or Logos, to give full expression to His nature in terms of

Daniel 7:13-14. (2) Matt 26:64. (3) Matt 24:30. (4) John 12:34.  
(5) John 12:46.



righteousness, love to mankind, Truth and Light. Upon this basis has been laid most of our Christian thinking, and the terms of the Logos conception, especially as in John's Gospel, are largely the terms in which we describe the relationship which we bear toward God in our Christian experience.

The word "Logos" though meaning "Word" and "Reason" in Classical Greek, has only the meaning "Word" in the N.T. A divine utterance, or a revelation of God, or, as in the Scriptures, a communication from God. The entire doctrine of the Logos finds expression nowhere else in the N.T. but in the prologue of the Gospel of John. The doctrine is, briefly, this, that Christ is a real Incarnation of an eternally Divine Person. He has exercised his activity in relation to the Universe. He is a distinct person from, but in vital relation to God. "He was God" says John, meaning that in His essential nature he was Deity. All Creative work, and all activity is by His agency. He is the unique and only perfect medium through whom God is known.

As to the growth of the Logos idea, we have already mentioned, in speaking of the Jewish conceptions of the various incarnations of God, that the idea of God as manifest upon earth in various forms, was at the very heart of the Jewish belief. "From the time of Heraclitus, a Logos doctrine had been developing in Greek thought for the purpose of explaining how Deity came into relation with the world" (1) This Greek conception had arisen through Plato's philosophy. Plato's transcendent God had





its counterpart in the God of Isaiah, "high and lifted up" (1) but Philo used the Logos conception of Plato to indicate that Creative force from which the world had arisen. This latter conception the Prologue of John embraces in its entirety. Philo's Logos, however, had no personal relationship to the world, and was not necessarily even personal at all. John added the further picture of the glory of the Logos. "And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of graciousness and truth". There had been no identification of the Logos with the Messiah, as far as Philo was concerned. His expression had nothing to do, either with Incarnation or Redemption. It became for John, however, a familiar vehicle to declare to both Jews and Greeks that in this Christ, they might each find their Saviour, and the revelation of God. To follow Christ, was, for John, to find God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," as John later quoted Jesus. (2).

To sum up, all that God wished to express to men, he had expressed in Christ. His revelation of Himself, through Christ, was complete. This was God in the flesh, the Son of Man and the Son of God, all that related God to men. In the striking words of Emerson to the Divinity Students at Cambridge; "And the unique impression of Jesus upon mankind, whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of this world, is proof of the subtle



virtue of this infusion. Jesus belonged to the true race of the prophets. He saw with open eyes the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had His being there. --- He saw that God incarnates Himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of His world. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion "I am Divine," "Through me God acts, through me speaks. Would you see God, see me, or see thee when thou also thinkest as I now think"(L)

Again, in the word of Milton.

"He, sovran priest, stooping his regal head  
That dropt with odorous oil down his fair eyes  
Poor fleshly tabernacle enter'd  
His starry frown low-roofed beneath the skies  
Oh, what a mask was there, what a disguise !" (2)

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Emerson. Ralph Waldo. Addresses to Divinity Students in Cambridge,  
July 15th 1838. (Harvard Classics. Vol 5.)

Milton. John. "The Passion" V 2.



## Chapter Six.

### The Modern Theological Statement of Incarnation.

As has been previously mentioned, much of our Christian faith of today has its roots in the Logos doctrine, and its development in Pauline and later theology. The conception of God in the flesh is not an isolated principle, but is in harmony with all religious aspirations, ideas and philosophical speculations concerning God in his relation to the Universe, including man. It must not be assumed from this, that the revelation of God to us, in terms of the "Incarnation" is the only revelation. As Willard Sperry puts it, "God is known by the incarnations of Himself in the world", and in that statement gives modern expression to the ancient word of the 12th Psalm. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork". Man, even in his most primitive conditions, has, as we have shown, sensed the presence of a mysterious power, revealed, or incarnated in physical objects. The point is, however, that man's ignorance of the nature of God has always prevented him from giving a higher expression to thoughts of God. Even though he has used the highest categories he has known, the expression has still been, in many cases, anything but flattering to God. That we have been privileged to know God in higher terms than was possible in days gone by is not so much a matter for pride as for humble thanks to God. Even so, there are people in our day to whom the highest expression of God is to be found in nature.



Professor Otto says, concerning this, "The equating of God with natural law is fatal. God without personality is no God at all." (1) Then, between the two extremes of the Transcendent God and the Immanent God, we have every shade of belief from pure Transcendence as mystic idealism, to Immanence as Pantheism.

Somewhere in the area between lies the problem of Good and Evil.

One phase of that problem is stated thus "All simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked on the problem of evil" (2)

A.E. Taylor presents another phase of the same problem when he says, "The Eternal Good inspires a man to struggle on!" He goes (3) on to say that "No philosophy of pure Immanence can take the moral life seriously!" If God, then, is to be thought of at all, the category of our thinking must not be alone that of personality, but must be in terms of personality at its highest, in unselfish moral conduct.

It is a human weakness that when men have arrived at a higher stage in their development, as in attaining to a higher appreciation of the Nature of God, they should tend to kick down the ladder up which they, through their ancestors climbed. Many of the erroneous expressions of the idea of the Incarnation of God, as they now appear to us, were, when stated, progressive steps toward a nobler expression. The category of the Virgin Birth was employed to emphasize the idea of absolute divinity.

Professor Otto. (The Idea of the Holy) P 201. (2) Whitehead, A.N.

(Religion in the Making) P 77. (3) A.E. Taylor (Faith &

Moralist) P 113.





The category of the Apocalyptic Messiah was employed previously, and is still employed by some to express a spiritual truth, namely, that there is victory in spiritual realms for those who put their trust fully in God, and seek His Kingdom's interests. In many presentations of the truths of the Incarnation, on the other hand, the very heights of grandeur in expression are reached. Paul, writing to the Romans, says "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they (the unrepentant) are without excuse" (1) In a later writing to the Ephesians, however, he summarizes philosophic thought at its best to say "When speaking of the revelation of God through Christ, "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (2)

For our purpose, writing in a day when much prominence is given to scientific investigation, it is necessary to speak at least partly in scientific categories. At the same time however, it must not be forgotten that much of the formulation of religious belief lies completely outside the realms wherein Science may properly carry its investigations. Speculation as to a world view brings the work of Science to our attention, to the effect that there has been a continual process of development or evolution from lower to higher forms, from inorganic to organic matter, from vegetable to animal life, and to man



as the highest in the scale, from the standpoint of the physical. Three possibilities exist as explanations of this developmental process. The first is that all of this came about by means of a divine Fiat, that God spoke and it was done, thus, that all was inherent in the original unitary cell in the realm of living substance, and that the unfolding was a natural process. If that be granted it must also be acknowledged that the original cell was a mighty piece of handiwork, more difficult of explanation than the unfolded process derived therefrom. Secondly, there is the possibility of the wholly mechanistic view, with or without an originating Cause, or God. This conception too fails to explain the presence of both order and purposiveness in the developmental process, and assumes instead a self-propelled world, a sum total of forces into which nothing is inserted from without. Spinoza states "God is not the Cause, but the permanent substratum of the Universe, the Immanent Essence of things" In other words, God and the Universe are one. There remains a third possibility, which accepts the developmental process, but which refuses to allow a place for God within its structure and development, the formulation expressed in the term "Emergent Evolution.

At the very beginning one must realize, as Temple has well said: "When Mind appears in the evolutionary process, one realizes that Mind must be the evolver of that process"(1) With that as a background, it is seen that the evolutionary



process, beginning in matter, goes on to life, then to mind, and then to the life of the spirit and reaches its apex in Deity. As says Coster, concerning the lower stages of this development "Life sleeps in the mineral world, dreams in the vegetable world, and becomes alive in the animal world, and is conscious in human life". It is evident that each new emergence, combining lower entities in a new combination, has had added to it something which did not exist previously in any of the lower entities.

It appears to be logical to state that in the ascending scale of values, from matter to life, to mind, to consciousness, we are justified in assuming that the attainment of spiritual insight is a higher development still. It seems logical too to carry one step forward to assume that that life of the spirit at its best would meet the requirements of Deity. If Deity is the highest that we know of life at its best, we are justified in asserting that whoever designed the entire process, Deity is at the highest point in its ongoing ~~XXXXXXXX~~ development. In other words, Deity expresses itself at each stage in the process, and the goal of all is the attainment of Deity. Thus the Transcendent God becomes the Immanent God in creative activity, and in the unfolding of His purpose in creation, and expresses Himself to men in their loftiest possibilities in thought. In Jesus Christ the highest peak in God's self-disclosure is reached. As to the problem of whether or not these disclosures are innate in Creation, and only brought forth, or inserted





at each successive stage, the statement of Streeter is helpful; "in the three stages, vegetable, animal, and human, either there is implicit new life, or new life is super-added to each stage" (1) We are forced to the acknowledgment, as Jacks points out also, that either the Universe is a dead mechanism or a live and responsive creation. His inference is that there is no lack of evidence that it is a live, and responsive creation, not as vegetable, but also human. (2) Even Spencer was driven to the conclusion that the "Unknowable lay behind the entire process which opened out before him from day to day. "Deeper than demonstration" he says, "deeper than definite cognition, deep as the very nature of mind, is the postulate at which we have arrived. We are in the presence of an infinite and eternal source of Energy from which all things proceed" (3) Then, again, "There is a power that transcends all knowledge, above, beyond, beneath, and behind the invisible world, and in every part of it, and which power is Infinite, and Eternal", is a summary given by Dr A.S. Tuttle, which summary gives the personality to the creative process which Spencer seems to feel exists, but will not acknowledge as personality. That personality, the Creative source of all things, we, as Christians, acknowledge as God. Expressed in whatever terms, by whatever means, He is both the Source and Goal of Creation. Revealed in Jesus Christ he is manifested in terms of the highest that we know, Personality.

Canon Streeter. (Reality) P119 - 124. (3) Spencer. Harcourt. (First Principles) P69. (2) Jacks. U.P. (A Living Universe) P 117.



This finally; we are aware that there are in the world two laws, operative throughout all animal life, human or otherwise, the law of the survival of the fittest, and the law of Love. The first operates on somewhat the same level in all physical life. The second finds a very low expression in the lower animal creation as the mother protects her young even with her life. In the realm of the spiritual, where we should expect to find the highest expression, we find the spirit of Jesus Christ expressed in the words on the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" The revelation which God gave to men indicates His desire that the law of love should be the ruling law of the Universe. Jesus on the Cross, praying for his enemies was the Incarnate Will of God expressed in terms of human life, governed by the law of Love. If, as seems right to assume Jesus was at that point the mirror of the Infinite God, it follows that all who manifest in their lives that same law of Love, are to that extent incarnations of the person of God.

In short, then, that element which was seen in embryo in the lowest forms of worship as fear, and perhaps horror, when stripped of its accretions, emerges in the highest form as worship and service to God. Those elements which were the original expression of the Creative process, and as such incarnations of God, become in the realm of loving personality the highest expressions of the same God who was in the beginning, and guides creation to its ultimate goal.



Chapter Seven.

Christian belief in Incarnation and the Scientific View.

It would seem advisable in conclusion, to consider the above stated view of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ in terms of the Scientific thinking of our day. To me the problem we face in regard to the attitude of Science toward religion may be simplified to allow its statement in the form of a question. Will Science grant the possibility of the existence of a metaphysical world lying beyond the realm of the physical, and as such beyond their proper field of investigation? I do not feel that Comte's expression of contempt is a true picture of this Scientific attitude. "Religion is a projection of phantasy" he said, "Let us rather turn to the positive facts of Science". Nor is Lippman's viewpoint an accurate expression, I would feel. "The acids of modernity have dissolved the gods" he said (1) Lord Kelvin states "Science is coming more and more to affirm a directive power, different from a physical power" (2) Eucken echoes the same sentiment when he says "That there remains beyond our sphere some dim immensity of being is scarcely open to dispute" (3) Bosanquet adds his testimony thus, "it seems well within the bounds of careful reason to say that a careful analysis of any human being in a single day, would establish triumphantly all that is needed in principle for the affirmation of the Eternal (4)

Lippman. Walter (1 Preface to Morals) (2) Jordan. L.H. (Comparative Religion) P 489. (3) Eucken. Rudolf. (Christianity and the New Idealism) P. 2. Bosanquet. B. Princ. of Individ and Value (337)



It must be recalled that the instruments of Science are experiment and measurement, and it is confined to the world of material things. However, in coming to some conclusion with regard to the possible sources of material existence there is fairly general agreement that Time is, as Bergson says "the fundamental reality of the Universe". "Time," he continues "is the very stuff (1) of Reality" Tylor also adds to that conviction "Time is the stuff out of which life is made. We only rise as we transcend it, superimposing the Eternal order upon the Eternal." (2) Bergson, basing his ideas upon the "flux and flow" ideas of Heraclitus, has this to say further. "Time is the instance plus the interval in the unbroken chain of duration" "Personality is the instance plus accumulated experience." The basis of conscious existence up to him the Memory, which he said was the "prolongation of the past into the present, gnawing its way into the future" (1)

Using Bergson's summary as a background, Professor S. Alexander added the conception of Space to "Time" and called his "Space-Time" the "stuff of the Universe" (3). Space and time, according to Alexander, are parts of a whole, since existence without either one would be impossible. This development of "Space-Time" however, gave to that formulation all that we conceive as

Bergson. Henri. (Creative Evolution) P 41. (2) A.T. Tylor. (Prith of Moralists) P 113. (3) Prof S. Alexander. (Space, Time, Deity)





God, from the standpoint of Time and Space. The Immortal God is the Universe, almost precisely as with Spinoza. Alexander asks the question, "What is the fundamental goal of Nature?" He answers the question thus, "Out of the Matrix of the Universe emerged first Matter. Built on, and rising out of Matter, still higher orders emerge, until Deity emerges as the Highest. Each higher level becomes deity for that below". God is to Alexander, the developing Universe, dependent upon it, and limited by it. The ultimate end seems not to be considered, but the purpose is inferred in another connection when, speaking of the mind as a "theatre of transition" he says, "Like other things, it has the glory of going on"(1) Upon the basis of his interpretation of the Universe in its varied relations, Alexander proceeded to point out that each higher emergence combines the elements already existing in the lower entities, and by that combination a new unity and a new emergent quality are introduced. He is careful to assert that in that new relatedness no addition has come from outside. The emergence has been entirely upon the basis of the existing forms and materials.

In regard to the statement of Alexander, the idea of a combination of the type mentioned without any purposive planning behind it, would seem to be almost absurd. Just as one does not expect/ to see forms of beauty thrown up from the wheels of a car spinning in the mud, it seems reasonable to



3. And that without the presence of a "Mind behind" in the new form which the existent entities shall take, there would be no new form.

In the lectureship of the following year, C. Lloyd Morgan, using the categories suggested by Alexander, made reference especially to the suggestion of the fusion of two elements to form a third. He said, in that regard, that if A and B unite to form E, there is implied in E a relatedness to A and B, which implies in turn a Causality of which E is the result. Then Morgan asked the quite logical question "What makes E, this new emergent, emerge?" Then the answer summarized his belief in regard to the entire creative process. "I acknowledge God, supplementary to Space-Time, as the Immaterial source of all change, the "Nexus" through whose creative activity emergents emerge, and the whole course of evolution is directed". (1) In this scientific conception God as source is seen as revealing himself increasingly in all stages of the process, and seeking higher and still higher forms to express himself, until in Jesus Christ the highest disclosure of Ultimate Reality in the Universe is given.

From this formulation which seems to me to meet the challenges of scientific investigation, and challenges a better explanation of emergent evolution, one can go forward to

Morgan. C. Lloyd. (Emergent Evolution)



the expression of Eucken concerning God's provision for man. (1)  
"The infinite power and love that has grounded a new spontaneous nature in man, over against the dark and hostile world will conserve the spiritual nature, and shelter it against all perils and assault. So that life, as the bearer of life eternal, can never be wholly lost in the stream of time. With this conception one has indeed directed his glance from periphery to center, and life, with its perfection, becomes his life"

In conclusion then; that power which to the primitive savage is Mans, mysterious and forbidding, is to the Scientist Energy, a force expressed in light, heat, sound, and so forth. Because of the limits of his field, he must needs confine himself to the field of the examination of the results he sees, while he who approaches from the standpoint of religious appreciation, sees the God from whom all of Creation streams., "Being represented in partial disclosures" (2). When man is willing to yield himself to God, his personality in that act of willingness, is capable of new perception, and God is seen through Christ in terms of spiritual Personality. This sentiment is given excellent expression in a word of Professor F Tracy  
"The very meaning and purpose of the Incarnation, I take it, is the annulment of the alienation of God and man: not by bringing God any nearer, but by showing men how near He has always been;

Eucken. Rudolf. (Truth of Religion) P435.  
Temple. William. (Nature, Man, and God) P 269.





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not to reconcile Him to us, but to reconcile us to Him; so that we shall be no longer strangers and foreigners, but members of his household. In the Incarnation of God in Christ, we are shown how those who are far off may be made nigh; how the door stands ajar, and with what bounding love He who has wandered far, wasted his substance, accompanied with swine, will be welcomed, if only he will return to the Father's house, where even the hired servants have breddenough and to spare." (1)

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Tracy. Professor. F. ("Canadian Baptist") April 1st 1940. P 5.















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